



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Department  
Office of Governor Deval L. Patrick  
Press Release**

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## **GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS LEGISLATION PROHIBITING POSSESSION, SALE, TRADE AND DISTRIBUTION OF SHARK FINS**

BOSTON – Thursday, July 24, 2014 – Governor Deval Patrick today signed H. 4088, “An Act Prohibiting the Possession, Sale, Trade and Distribution of Shark Fins.” With this legislation, the Commonwealth prohibits the commercial possession and sale of shark fins in Massachusetts, although licenses can be issued to possess shark fins for scientific research. Additionally, the possession and sale of fins from several locally caught species such as skate, smooth hound sharks and spiny dogfish is not prohibited.

"With the passing of this law Massachusetts builds upon its long history of animal protection and environmental stewardship," said Governor Patrick. "I congratulate the passionate animal welfare and ocean conservation leaders who worked together to ensure the conservation of sharks and our oceans for generations to come."

Punishment for violating this provision would include fines ranging from \$500 to \$1,000, imprisonment for up to 60 days and the suspension or revocation of fishing licenses.

The bill primarily affects distributors and retailers of imported shark fins, including markets and restaurant, and will have a minimal impact on Massachusetts commercial fishing and processing due to the exemption of locally caught species.

The law is the product of two separate bills that were filed by Representative David Nangle and Senator Jason Lewis on behalf of 9-year-old Sean Lesniak, a Lowell native who has loved sharks since he was 3. Sean wanted to do something to try to stop the practice of shark finning, the removal and retention of shark fins while the remainder of the living fish is discarded in the ocean leaving the shark unable to move and ultimately causing death from a predator or suffocation.

After writing a letter to his local elected official, Representative Nangle, the Representative filed a bill on Sean's behalf to ban shark finning in the Commonwealth. Last summer, Sean testified in support of the legislation before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary, explaining that shark finning has decimated shark populations around the world. He emphasized to the committee that these marine fish are essential to maintaining a healthy ocean ecosystem, and that the extinction of sharks can lead to the collapse of fisheries.

"I am glad that the Representatives, Senators and Governor realized how important this bill is to the preservation and conservation of sharks," said Lesniak. "Sharks are needed to keep our oceans balanced and healthy. I really want to thank all parties that worked so hard to make this a reality."

The final bill passed the House and Senate with strong bipartisan support.

“Taking steps to diminish this unspeakably inhumane practice isn’t just a moral issue about preventing cruelty to animals,” said Senator Lewis. “This is also an important environmental and economic issue. Healthy shark populations are vital for a functioning ecosystem in our oceans. Removing Massachusetts from participating in the cruel shark fin trade is the right thing to do morally, environmentally and economically.”

“It has been truly an honor to watch the progress of this legislation, and to watch how Sean has grown throughout the process,” said Representative Nangle. “He was already quite the expert on sharks when we first met, and now he is an expert on the legislative process. I am extremely proud of him; his involvement in the passage of this bill is a great testament to the civics education the youth of the Commonwealth have available to them. Massachusetts can now join the ranks of the growing number of states that are taking a stand against this inhumane practice. Sean took a stand for what he believes in - I hope this inspires others to make their voices heard on issues that are important to them.”

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